

**SEA CHANGE:**  
Allenby, on his  
61-foot fishing  
boat, says he has  
learned to let go  
of his negativity.



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# DEAD CALM

After years of battling his own combustible temper—not to mention a near-fatal car wreck, a divorce, and a public spat with another pro—straight-shooting Aussie **ROBERT ALLENBY** is taking a new, carefree approach to the game, and life. You got a problem with that?

INTERVIEW BY ALAN BASTABLE. PHOTOGRAPHY: JOSH RITCHIE

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**ROBERT ALLENBY WAS THE NEXT BIG THING.** IN the early '90s an Aussie tabloid dubbed him "Normanby," making him the first, though certainly not the last, Australian golfer to assume the burden of enormous expectations in the post-Shark era. Others saw in Allenby even greater potential. "He has an amazing ability to rise to the occasion in a crisis," said Australian legend Peter Thomson, "which is potentially the big difference between him and Norman." Then everything went black. Just as Allenby's career was hitting full stride, a car crash on a misty night in Spain in 1996 nearly ended his life. Years of pain and frustration followed as he clawed his way back, but Allenby is not dwelling on the past. Not anymore, that is. With a new attitude adjustment—"I'm not beating myself up anymore," he says—he is a new man playing a lot like his old self. And whatever the topic—his scrape with death, his ugly spat with Tour pro Mark Hensby, drug use on the PGA Tour—Allenby is as candid as ever. ➤

**F**or years you found it difficult to talk about your accident. What happened that night? You were in a Spanish beach town, on your way home from dinner, right?

Right. So I'm probably doing about 45 mph, nothing crazy. But I didn't know the road that well and a sea mist had come in, so I couldn't see that far in front of me. And then—

bang!—straight into a roundabout. It was solid concrete, about four or five feet high all the way around. The last thing I remember is saying, "Oh, sh-t!" The car stopped dead, the seat belt snapped, and I went straight through the windscreen. I cut my head open on the top [roll] bar. From there I went through the windscreen and my teeth split my lip open like a sardine can. Then I smashed the steering wheel with my chest and broke my sternum.

**Your doctors said you were lucky to survive.**

They thought I'd broken my neck, and that I'd have brain damage because of how deep the cut was and how much of my skull was open. The worst part was I was unconscious for a couple hours, and when I came to, I was in the middle of an MRI, in a brain scan. I'm lying on my back with [the scanner] next to my face. I'm screaming my ass off. I tried to move my neck and couldn't, and that's when I knew there was something wrong.

**How much did your injuries set back your career?**

I had just won three tournaments on the European Tour and I was playing really awesome golf. Then the accident happened. It set me back a few years—mentally and physically. Even now if I press hard enough on the bottom of my sternum it still hurts. I have problems with my neck every week on Tour. And I've had to do so much physical training because I virtually changed the whole shape of my spine. I spent probably five years trying to force my game to get back to where it was. The years just kept flying by, and I was like, "Sh-t, I've got to do something about this." Then at the start of last year I realized that I was going to have to make a change if I wanted to get my game back to where I thought it should be.



**CATCH THIS:** Allenby says he has "really lightened up so much."

**Where should it be?**

A top-10 or top-15 player for the next 10 years or so. I'm getting there. I've got everything right where I want it.

**You had 16 top 10s from 2007-08.**

**How did you jump-start your game?**  
The biggest thing that's helped me is working with Peter Crone. He's not a sports psychologist, but more of a life coach. The first week we worked together was L.A. last year and I finished third. What he does is remove all the crap, the things that you make up, the things that you worry about that aren't true. I've been working on the present instead of worrying about what I did two years ago or what could happen in the future. It's really helped my golf because it doesn't matter if I miss a putt. It doesn't matter if I hit it in the trees left—it's only a golf shot. In the past it's always been, "Oh, you

idiot! What did you do that for?" That's been the biggest change in my game. I'm playing golf with complete freedom.

**You've had your share of outbursts after poor shots. What was the source of your temper?**

It's really just from trying too hard. I've always been very competitive. I just hate to lose. I hate to make mistakes. But now it's like, "Hey, it's all right, because I'm only human." I've really lightened up so much.

**You've won 19 times, including seven Australian majors, but nothing in the U.S. since 2001.**

It's been tough—or it was tough. Now it's no big deal because it is what it is. I know that my time will come pretty soon. It's not from a lack of trying, that's for sure.

**Before Adam Scott and Aaron Baddeley, you were pegged as the next Greg Norman. Did you feel pressure trying to fulfill those expectations?**

I knew I had the game, but I was always putting a lot of pressure on myself because I wanted it so badly. And when you want something so badly—and you can ask Greg Norman about the Masters—it makes it that much harder to get it. That's always been my problem: I've pushed it too hard.

**ON THE CRASH**

**"I'm screaming my ass off. I tried to move my neck and couldn't, and that's when I knew there was something wrong."**



**Your playoff record is exceptional—you're 10-1 in your pro career and 3-1 on the PGA Tour. Clearly you thrive under pressure.**

Yeah, I do. I never back off—I just see the shot and hit it. It either comes off or it doesn't. Most of the playoffs I've been in, it has come off.

**You're one of golf's most opinionated players. Have you said things you've regretted?**

Sometimes, but whatever I've said I've always thought at the time it was the right thing to say. You do regret some remarks, but if someone pisses you off that much, eventually you've got to tell them to get stuffed. I try and be as nice as I can. Two years ago I would have told someone where to go. Now I'm like, "No comment, let's just move on." But the Australian sports media always want to talk about the bad things. Negative press sells papers.

**So this would be a bad time to ask you about Mark Hensby?**

[Laughs.] Go ahead.

**How's your relationship with him these days?**

We're good friends now. A couple of years ago there were a few words said. About 10 minutes before I went into the interview room [at the 2005 Australian Open] he had been in there and said Greg Norman had never done anything for the [Australasian] Tour. So I go in and they ask, "Well, what do you reckon about Hensby saying that Greg Norman has done nothing for this Tour?" And I said, "I don't remember a Mark Hensby Holden International Tournament, do you?" I just said things like that. I didn't say, "Mark Hensby's an absolute wanker."

**But that's precisely what you called him five months later at the Masters. You were quoted in the newspapers**



ROBERT BECK/S, OPPOSITE PAGE: AP/GETTY IMAGES

**CLOSE CALL: Allenby's T7 at Riviera in 2008 was one of his eight top-10s. Opposite page: With wife, Sandy, and kids Harry and Lily.**

**as saying Hensby's "a wanker, that's the bottom line."**

[Laughs.] But the way I said it—it was halfhearted, as a kind gesture. That's where things got taken out of context. He was a good friend, but he'd taken it the wrong way because he never heard how I said it. Everyone is laughing about it, but all of a sudden he comes to me on the first tee and says, "Don't you ever talk to me again. I don't want anything to do with you—ever." Two years later he came up to me and apologized. We shook hands, patted each other on the back and walked off as mates.

**Do you think Tour pros are generally too tight-lipped?**

Absolutely. Most of them are scared of the consequences, so they think they're better off saying nothing. Nine times out of 10 that's probably the better way to go, but do you want to be a man or a mouse?

**Do you feel like the forgotten Aussie?**

It doesn't concern me. It might have a few years ago. I've just got to win more.

**So you're not jealous of Adam Scott and his groupies?**

No, that's all right. I've got all the grandmas. [Laughs.]



ROBERT CANE/LOVE/GETTY IMAGES

**PARTY TIME: Allenby hydrates the greens at the 2005 Australian Masters.**

## ON TIGHT-LIPPED TOUR PROS

“Most of them are scared of the consequences, so they think they’re better off saying nothing. That’s probably the better way to go, but do you want to be a man or a mouse?”

**Back to your accident. About a month after the wreck you flew from Melbourne to Spain and hit one shot at the Volvo Masters so that you could collect \$145,000 in bonus money for finishing third on the Order of Merit.**

I told the European Tour, “I’ve got a broken sternum, my head is still full of stitches, I can’t play.” And they just said, “Well, you won’t get any bonus money.” This was 12 years ago, when \$145,000 was a fortune. So I asked them, “What counts as playing the tournament?” Ken Schofield [then the European Tour’s executive director] said, “Well, you just have to tee off the first hole. You’ll get last place money in the tournament and be entitled to your bonus.” So I bought a first-class ticket to Spain and got to the course about an hour before my tee time. I got a friend of mine to tee the ball up for me, and then I tapped it off the tee and walked back to the clubhouse. I felt pretty bad because I was taking a spot from someone else and the Tour didn’t really explain it properly to him. But why shouldn’t I be entitled to that money? I had played so well all year.

**You gave the bonus to charity, right?**

I did, yeah.

**Four months before the accident you divorced your first wife. You’ve said you regretted that marriage.**

It was just a bad choice. I learned from it and moved on and then I remarried in ’99. I married Sandy. She’s awesome. She’s a little bit older than me and I think that’s what I needed—someone who was more mature. We’ve always been the best of friends, and we now have two beautiful kids.

**You were the second player drug tested this year on Tour. I hear you struggled to provide a sample.**

[Laughs.] It was at Congressional. One of the [officials] says, “Come with me around the corner. Wash your hands but don’t use soap.” No worries. So there’s a normal sit-down toilet but there’s a mirror behind, probably 10 feet by 8 feet. And he says, “I’d like you to drop your strides and pull your shirt up.” He’s like two steps behind

my right shoulder and he’s looking at me in the mirror and he says “OK, you’re fine to go.” So I’m trying to pee and I’m like, “Mate, I’ve got stage fright.” So he moves out of the way and I start peeing into this cup. I barely get it to the line and I’m like, “Phew, thank god for that!”

**And...?**

Well, I never got a phone call, so I guess I’m good.

**Have you seen drug use on the Tour?**

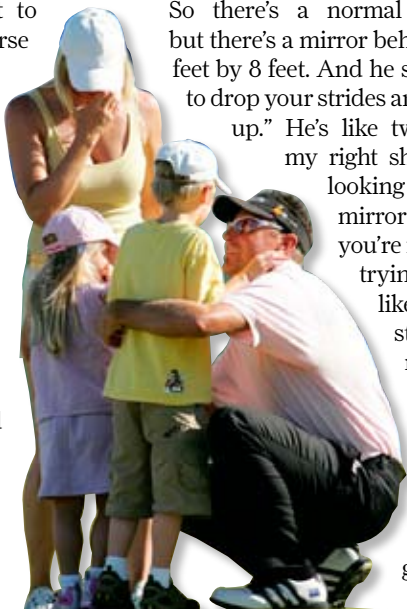
I know a couple of people on Tour who smoke a lot of marijuana, but I bet they don’t smoke it anymore. I don’t see how that could help—you’d be spaced out. I’ve only [smoked] it once. I was 17. It wasn’t the greatest feeling. I played with a couple of guys back in the ’90s and I’d go in the Porta-John next to them and I could smell something. I’d go, “Did that taste good?” And they said, “Aw, yeah, man, this is good sh-t.”

**This was during a tournament?**

Yeah, but those days are done. Those guys aren’t even on Tour anymore.

**Now that you’re finding your game again, do you feel that you need to win a major to validate your career?**

There are a lot better players than me who haven’t won one, though I feel like I’m getting closer. I’m not dwelling on it. Look at Mark O’Meara—he didn’t win his first major until he was 41. There’s hope for me yet, mate. ■



### Rent-An-Aussie

If Allenby sounds like your kind of bloke, he’s all yours—for \$40,000. Allenby has launched a new business called “C’mon, Aussie” through which he leases himself for two-day outings for eight people. (Four-person outings are \$30,000.) Retreats include a golf clinic with Allenby, a round at his club, The Bear’s Club in Jupiter, Fla., a day of deep-sea fishing on his 61-foot boat and dinner at his place.



For more information, call Ken Kennerly at 561-799-4603.